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# THE SEWANEE REVIEW

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## MEREJKOWSKI, A PROPHET OF THE NEW RUSSIA

"The Russian revolution will spare nothing. What will come of it? Then will come the burst into the unknown, 'the flight with heels pointed in the air.' The Russian revolution is world-embracing." Thus wrote Dmitri Merejkowski of the revolution of 1905, in the introduction to a volume on its religious and mystic meaning. That revolutionary movement, stayed for a brief season, a year ago swept aside all temporary barriers and is still fleeing with heels pointed in the air. Whether it will run its ultimate course, and if so, whether it will drag the rest of civilization with it to our triumph or undoing, or whether it will be curbed in its flight and made to drag the patient German wain, a subdued and docile Pegasus, these are questions that look to the future, immediate or remote, for answer.

In the meantime, what of the movement itself, apparently so foreign to us, and yet a menacing apparition, fleeting film-like across the familiar outlines of our social order? What is its animating spirit? Is it akin to the revolutions that have preceded it in western Europe, economically determined, bent on material ends, creature of an envious and grasping proletariat seeking to wrest its satisfactions from the bourgeois, as the bourgeois in turn had wrested theirs from the nobility, serving a god of material comfort and happiness? Or is it a child of the spirit, creature of aspirations and dreams, a new faith for humanity, fresh with the purity of morning's first flush, a gate opening into a new Jerusalem, the abode of mankind as it is to be?

To the prophetic answering of these questions, the most eloquent and engaging of the modern Russian intellectuals, the

mystic and transcendental novelist and critic, Merejkowski, has devoted the labors of his life. Merejkowski is *par excellence* the prophet of the new Russia—whether a true prophet or a false, the future must answer. Merejkowski explains the revolution from within. Doubtless this explanation seems remote and fantastic to many of his countrymen, but it is an index to the aspirations of the more transcendental Russians.

At the very outset, however, the guide himself discourages us and warns us from the quest: "The very minutest detail of our revolution is known to Europe, but the innermost meaning of the events remains hidden from you. Europe knows only the body, not the soul of the Russian revolution. This soul, the soul of the Russian people, remains an eternal riddle to you. . . . This mystic will, which forms the basic principle of the Russian soul, is made partly comprehensible to you through the works of our greatest writers, Tolstoi and Dostoïevski; partly, but not entirely. To grasp it fully, it is not enough to read us, one must live us. And this is difficult and fearful; much more fearful, as we said, than you realize." "Eternal riddle" though it may be, if we are all some day to "live Russia," as Merejkowski believes that we ultimately must if we would be saved, we must venture.

Enigmatic as is much that Merejkowski wrote, and remote as is his mysticism from our western objectivity of thought, from the comparative study of his works emerges a more or less well-defined social philosophy.

Western Europe and America, as Merejkowski understands them, are ill, ill almost unto death. They are morally and spiritually diseased. This moral and spiritual decay is due to the decline of religion, for Christianity, from the days of the earliest theologians an incomplete religion, allowing play only to part of life, has now lost even the saving excellence which it once possessed. Centuries ago it identified itself with the reactionary forces, and they have slowly stifled it. From the apostolic days a joyless religion, blighting the gaiety of men, denouncing the flesh and curbing its impulses, it yet exalted the sacredness of suffering, and made possible an active, though one-sided, emotional life. But now it has lost even this saving grace, and is

being replaced by a philosophy of positivism, which masquerades at times in the frayed garments of Christianity, but which prostitutes the flesh and ignores the spirit. Neither Christ nor Dionysus figures in this philosophy, neither the mystery of the spirit nor the equally noble mystery of the flesh. This noxious and ugly philosophy is the only philosophy that could flower in the stifling atmosphere of commercial bourgeoisism. It is a religion that satisfies itself with the gratification of low-lying creature comforts. Unless this philosophy is replaced by a healthier, the inevitable outcome will be the domination of Europe and America by the Japanese and the Chinese, since these peoples are the most absolute representatives of the positivistic spirit, not hampered by those rags of Christian romanticism that still hang to western Europe. "The Chinese are perfect positivists, while the Europeans are not yet perfect Chinese, and, in this respect, the Americans are perfect Europeans." This philosophy, however, is not to be changed by any mere redistribution of physical goods. Socialism, as currently conceived, worships no new gods: "The starved proletariat and the rejected bourgeois have different economic opinions, but their ideal is the same, the pursuit of happiness."

What door of escape, then, lies open before us? One alone: the discovery, or creation, of an adequate religious ideal. Without this we are lost. Yet the fact that the situation is so desperate is in itself prophetic that the ideal will be found. Christianity, as traditionally conceived, is an outworn creed; science, with its religion of positivism, has driven dogmatism from the field, but, cold and unemotional, stopping short of any dynamic spiritual force, is itself powerless to save.

"Not in abstract speculations," says Merejkowski, "but in exact experiments, worthy of our present science, in human souls did Dostoievski show that the work of universal history, which began with the Renaissance and the Reformation, the method of strictly scientific, critical, discriminating thought, if not already completed, is approaching completion; that 'his road has all been traversed to the end, so that there is no further to go,' and that not only Russia, but all Europe has 'reached a certain fixed point and is tottering over an abyss.' At the same time he showed with an

almost complete clearness of judgment that we must inevitably turn to the work of the new thought, creative and religious.

"All the veils of obsolete, theological, or metaphysical dogmatism have been removed or torn away by the criticism of knowledge. But behind these veils there proved to be not barren emptiness, not unvarying ineptitude (as the facile sceptics of the eighteenth century supposed, with their light incredulity), but a living and attracting deep, the most living and the most attractive ever laid bare before men's eyes. The overthrow of dogmatism not only does not prevent, but more than anything makes for the possibility of a true religion. Superstitions, fabulous phantasms lose their substance, but reality itself becomes merely *conditional*, not superstitious but only *unbelieving*, and for some reason all the more it does so, more than ever a phantom. Religious and metaphysical dreams lose their reality, but waking itself becomes 'as real as dreams.' . . . .

"No, after four centuries of labor and critical reflection the world does *not* remain as terrible and mysterious as it was. [However,] it has become still more awe-inspiring and enigmatic. In spite of all its unspeakable outward dullness and poorness, in spite of this commonplaceness, the world has never yet been so ripe for religion as in our day, and withal for a religion that is final and will complete the world's evolution, partly fulfilled at the first, and predicted for the second coming of the Word.

"In fact, present-day European man has before him the unavoidable choice between three courses. The first is final recovery from the disease which in that case men would have to call the 'idea of God.' This would be recovery to a greater blank than the present, because now at least men suffer. Complete positive recovery from 'God' is possible only in the complete, but as yet only dimly foreshadowed, vacuity of a social tower of Babel. The second course is to die of this complaint by final degeneration, decay, or 'decadence,' in the madness of Nietzsche and Kirillov, the prophets of the Man-god, who, forsooth, is to extirpate the God-man. And, lastly, the third resort is the religion of a last great union, a great Symbolon, the religion of a Second Coming, the religion of the voluntary end of all."

The religion of the Second Coming, the religion of the Spirit, the harmony of the age-long struggle between the ideas of the God-man and of the Man-god, the synthesis of knowledge, will,

and love, such are the elements that will go to compounding this new faith. Moreover, Russia is to lead Europe to the light, for, although Merejkowski confessed in 1905 that "On all the phenomena of our modern spirit is set the seal of philosophic and religious impotence and unfruitfulness," he yet added, "We must look to ourselves for salvation, if salvation of Europe there is to be."

With a faith, one hardly knows whether more naïve or more sublime, Merejkowski sees the finger of destiny pointing through the ages to present-day Russia to define and illustrate for mankind the ultimate faith in which the race may repose, sees the streams of history converging there, sees Russia as the holy one chosen from among the nations to bring glad tidings once more to the race, to usher in the millenium. And this in no idle, figurative sense, but an altogether concrete belief, a very definite, practical, patriotic expectation. Is it any wonder that the words glow on his pages, as they glowed on the lips of the Hebrew prophets! To arouse the nation to its high calling, to help prepare for the new age, such has been the high purpose actuating all of Merejkowski's literary work since he cast aside the classical exercises of his early post-university days and faced life. The forms that he has employed are historical romances and critical essays.

The brilliant trilogy of romances, *The Death of the Gods*, sometimes called *Julian the Apostate*; *The Resurrection of the Gods*, sometimes called *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci*; and *Peter and Alexis*, deal with the three periods when the struggle between Christian philosophy and Hellenic philosophy, or between Christ and Antichrist, was most acute, and the stories centre around those characters who best typify this conflict of ideals. The first depicts the furious but vain efforts of Julian the Apostate to reinstate the Greek gods in a society which has become obsessed with the Christian point of view; the second depicts the High Renaissance in Italy when, despite the perverid denunciations of a Savonarola, all classes are passionately searching for the Olympians, and the beauty of the human body and the lordliness of the human intellect reassert themselves; the third deals with the Hellenic revival in Russia, under the

leadership of Peter the Great, and portrays the tragic struggle between the forward-looking monarch, superb in will, prophetic of the Nietzschean superman, and his timid son, who embodies the traditional ecclesiasticism.

It is well to understand what Merejkowski means by Christ and by Antichrist. By Christ he means not the actual Christ, but the Christ of tradition. This traditional Christ is preponderatingly a Hebraistic conception, and because Hebraistic denies the sacredness of the physical and natural man. The evolution of the Hebrew attitude Merejkowski traces as follows:—

“A handful of wandering Semites, shepherds and nomads—alien to all, persecuted by all, hated and despised, lost in the wilderness, and for thousands of years seeing nothing above it but the sky, or around it but bare, dead regions, and before it the solitary horizon — set to thinking over the unity of the external and inward creation.

“With incredible arrogance this paltry tribe declared itself the chosen one of all tribes and nations, the single people of its God, the one true God. And in all living bodies it saw only a soulless body, for blood-sacrifices and holocausts to the one God of Israel. The face of man, its own face, it fenced off and separated as the likeness and image of God from all animal beings by an impassable gulf. In this idea of terrible loneliness and solitude, in the idea of a jealous God, destroying like fire, there is something of the breath of that fiery wilderness from which this tribe issued: a breath instantly heated, and therefore at times startlingly productive, but also death-dealing and parching.”

By a curious paradox, out of this very race came Christ, who was completely emancipated from the Hebraistic bias, and who revered impartially the physical and the spiritual. He was Himself the word made flesh, He loved all nature, animate and inanimate, with superlative tenderness, He taught as the crowning truth the resurrection of the body, and in the Lord's Supper performed the mystic wedding of the flesh and the spirit. He was both the God-man and the Man-god, the ultimate product prematurely produced.

He was not the frail creature of pictorial tradition, but a stalwart, bronzed peasant, who loved laughter and mirth, lived in the open, sanctified the senses. He was Dionysus. But He was

also Apollo, for He explored the depths of the spirit, experienced the utmost refinements of consciousness, and enunciated the profoundest dictum of the ages, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Moreover He was the superman, unflinchingly impressing upon the physical universe and upon humanity the dictates of His own lordly will. He was forced to recognize that His coming was premature, but He foretold a second coming, the age of the spirit, the promise of the higher race.

While a compound of late Hellenic and of Hebraic thought, the Christ who survived in tradition was predominately a Semitic Christ, a Christ shorn of His rich humanity, intolerant of the senses and of the intellect, encouraging mortification of the flesh, and preaching the barrenness and futility of the earthly life.

Opposed to this Christ was the Antichrist of the Aryan idea. This idea, immemorially old, ineradicable, facing in one direction taught the sanctity of the animal, the union of the divine and the physical, and gave rich play to all that that implies; and facing in the other, anticipated the superman which man is to become. It half-consciously recognized—what we fully recognize to-day—that man stands between the pre-human and the super-human, between the Beast and the God.

"Here for the first time," says Merejkowski in speaking of Christianity's first contact with the Aryans, "the spirit of Semitism, the spirit of the waste and of laying waste, breathed on the magnificent, wild, many-foliaged, magic wood of the Indo-Europeans, and infected one of its branches with a powerful and infectious poison.

"The freshly arrived and simple northern semi-barbarians, who had scarcely left the forest defiles, received the ancient and subtle cult with childish simplicity and coarseness. By Christianity they were captivated as by fear, attracted as by a precipice. They seized upon that side of Christianity which was most alien and opposed to their own nature, namely, the exclusively Semitic side; mortification of the irredeemably sinful body, and fear, became their faith, and primitive wild nature their Devil.

"This spirit of revived Judaism, the spirit of the desert in which Israel had wandered, grew stronger and stronger in



the Middle Ages. It passed like a fiery whirlwind over all European civilization, withering the last blossoms and fruits of Græco-Roman antiquity, until the very Renaissance, when apparently it fell palsied. It recovered, and is rampant to-day."

*The Death of the Gods* presents a curious, vari-colored medley of tangled paganism and Christianity. There are Christians who, to mortify the flesh, make a virtue of bodily filth, of fasting, of flagellation, or of solitude; Christians who would establish the kingdom by violence, burning the temples of Apollo, breaking down the branches of the ancient laurel, befouling the springs, tramping on the sleeping flowers; or again Christians who, seeking to worship the Christ of love, end in the worship of Dionysus, so deep-seated is the Aryan impulse. On the other hand, there are pagan revellers who give themselves up to the extremes of Bacchanalian excess, and pagan philosophers and orators who, deserting the cool environs of the portico, indulge in fatuous scandal and mutual recrimination. Then there are a host of poltroons, pagans one day, Christians the next, who blow hot or cold as expediency dictates. In contrast to this multitude, fanatical or craven, here and there is a pagan or a Christian who is upheld by the vision of the real Apollo or of the real Christ. Preëminent among these nobler souls is the apostate Julian, who, though he wastes his life in the futile effort to stay the incoming tide of Christianity, is magnanimous even in death, and, despite mocking lapses into delirium, dies, as becomes a superman, the master of his soul: "Let the Galilean triumph. We shall conquer later on. And then shall begin on earth the reign of the equals of the gods, souls laughing forever like the sun. . . . Helios, receive me into thyself!"

But the most significant characters are the little group who cannot choose between Olympus and Christ, and who are feeling after the great reconciliation. In the closing chapter such a group—Arsinoë, a sculptress, once a Christian nun, Anatolius, imperator of the cavalry under Julian, and Ammianus Marcellinus, the historian—are on a merchant galley that has put out from Antioch, bound for a secluded villa at Baiæ, where they will seek "to heal their wounds" of spirit. The evening is calm.

The sun is sinking amid rosy clouds. Anatolius is gazing at the water, musing on the phrase "the many-laughtered sea"; Arsinoe is modeling a figure in wax: is it Dionysus or Christ? Ammianus Marcellinus is reading. The galley coasts a green-pastured islet; Anatolius looks up and sees, seated at the foot of a plane-tree, with the sheep feeding around, a lad and a young girl, shepherd children. "Behind them, among cypresses, was a small rough figure of Pan playing the flute. Anatolius turned toward Arsinoe to point out this remote and peaceful nook of a lost Hellas; but the words died on his lips. Wholly rapt, and with a look of strange gaiety, the artist was intent on her creation, the waxen statuette, with its face of haunting sadness and its proud Olympian attitude.

"Anatolius felt her mood like a rebuff. He asked Arsinoe in a harsh unsteady voice, pointing at the model,—

"'Why are you making that? what does the thing stand for?'

"Slowly and with effort, she raised her eyes to his; and he mused,—

"'The sibyls must have eyes like those!' and then aloud: 'Arsinoe, do you think that this work of yours will be understood?'

"'What matters it, friend?' she answered, smiling gravely. Then she added in a lower tone, as if communing with herself: 'He will stretch out his hands toward the world. He must be inexorable and terrible as Mithra-Dionysus in all his strength and beauty; yet merciful and humble.' . . .

"'What do you mean? is not that an impossible contradiction?'

"'Who knows? For us, yes; but for the future.' . . .

"The sun was descending lower. Above him, on the horizon westward, a storm-cloud was impending, and the last rays illumined the island with a soft, almost melancholy, glow.

"The shepherd lad and his companion approached Pan's altar to make their evening sacrifice.

"'Is it your belief, Arsinoe,' continued Anatolius, 'is it your faith that unknown brothers of ours shall pick up the threads of our existence, and, following the clue, go immeasurably farther than we? Do you believe that all shall not perish in the barbaric gloom which is sinking on Rome

and Hellas? Ah, if that were so! If one could trust the future.' . . .

"‘Yes;’ exclaimed Arsinoe, a prophetic gleam in her sombre eyes, ‘the future is in us, in our madness and our anguish; Julian was right. Content without glory, in silence, strangers to all, and solitary among men, we must work out our work to the end. We must hide and cherish the last, the utmost spark amongst the ashes of the altar, that tribes and nations of the future may kindle from it new torches! Where we finish they shall begin. Let Hellas die! Men shall dig up her relics—unearth her divine fragments of marble, yea, over them shall weep and pray! From our tombs shall the yellowed leaves of the books we love be unsealed, and the ancient stories of Homer, the wisdom of Plato, shall be spelt out slowly anew, as by little children. And with Hellas, you and I shall live again!’

"‘And with us revives the curse on us;’ exclaimed Anatolius. ‘The struggle between Olympus and Golgotha will begin over again!—Why? And when shall that struggle end? Answer, sibyl, if thou canst!’

"Arsinoe was silent, and her eyes fell. Then she glanced at Ammianus and pointed to him—

"‘There is one who will answer you better than I. Like ours, his heart is shared between Christ and Olympus, and yet he keeps the lucidity of his soul.’

"Ammianus Marcellinus, putting aside the manuscript by Clement, had been quietly listening to the discussion.

"‘In truth,’ said the Epicurean, addressing him, ‘we have now been friends for more than four months, and yet I do not know whether you are a Christian or a Hellenist?’

"‘Nor I myself,’ answered the young Ammianus frankly, with a blush.

"‘What? No torture of doubts? No suffering from the antagonism between the Greek and the Christian doctrine?’

"‘No, my friend; I think that the two teachings in many points agree. . . . All you suggest is already written here; and with far ampler powers than mine. This is the *Patchwork* of Clement of Alexander, in which he proves that the greatness of Rome and the philosophy of Hellas paved the way for the teaching of Christ, and, by maxims and numberless forecasts, made the first decided steps toward the earthly kingdom of God. Plato is the forerunner of Jesus the Nazarene.’

"The last words, spoken with perfect simplicity, profoundly impressed Anatolius. . . . The vista of a new world was momentarily opened to his mind.

"Meanwhile the trireme was heading round the cape; the little wood of cypress had almost disappeared behind the cliffs. Anatolius threw a last look at the lad and girl before the altar of Pan. The girl was pouring out the evening offering of goat's milk and honey; the boy beginning to play on his reed-pipe. The thin blue smoke of sacrifice could be seen rising above the wood after the human figures had vanished and while the trireme made for the open sea.

"From the fore-part of the ship there came upon the silence a solemn music; the old monks were chanting in unison their evening prayer. . . .

"But over the still water came faint and clear notes of another melody. It was the little shepherd, piping his nocturnal hymn to Pan, the old god of gaiety, of freedom and love.

"Anatolius felt a thrill of wonder and surmise.

"'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,' the monks chanted.

"The silvery notes of the shepherd's flute, floating high in the sky, mingled with the words of the Christians.

"The last beams faded from that happy islet, leaving it dull and hueless in the midst of the sea. Both hymns ceased.

"The wind blew sharply in the rigging and whipped up grey and white waves. The straining galley-timbers creaked and groaned. Shadows approached from the southward and the sea grew swiftly dark. Huge clouds massed overhead, and from beyond the horizon came the first long intermittent roll of thunder.

"Night and Tempest, hand in hand, were striding on apace."

*The Resurrection of the Gods* fulfills the prophecy of Arsinoë. The wine of the antique culture, the rarer for its long neglect, is unearthed, and all classes, as they taste its tang, feel the glow of new life. The romance opens with the discovery of a statue of Venus. As the goddess had once arisen from the foam of the sea, so now, with her ineffable smile, she ascends from her millennial tomb in the darkness of the earth, while mortals breathe her praise:—

"Glory to thee, golden-limbed Aphrodite,  
Delight of the gods and of mortals."

The romance is a series of brilliant studies of the High Renaissance, done with a fidelity that carries the verisimilitude of contemporary records. Into this astonishing historical tapestry are

woven the figures of virtually all the men and women who immortalized early sixteenth-century Italy. But the dominating character is Leonardo da Vinci; indeed, varied as are the episodes, they all gain their focal significance from his participation in them or his reaction upon them. Sculptor, painter, mathematician, civil, mechanical, mining, and military engineer, inventor of combustibles and of warlike engines of destruction, landscape gardener and horticulturist, chemist, botanist, biologist, and geologist—anticipating the theory of evolution, aeronautist—constantly returning to the problem of the human bird, in short the most nearly universal genius of the ages, such, based upon years of study of the things that Leonardo created and of the prodigious volumes of manuscript notes that he left, such is the character that Merejkowski gives to Leonardo. Not three, but five centuries ahead of his time, this superb man, who willed to know and who took for his motto the saying of Jesus, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," misunderstood, abused, maligned, fascinating men yet feared by them, meeting in a lifetime only one friend who understood him and bereft of this friend just when he was discovering the supreme value of a spiritual friendship, moves across the stage of life, and stumbles off with whirling dreams of weights that pull him earthward and of gigantic wings that bear him up, beating in his brain. So considerate of life that he would lift the very worm from his path lest his foot crush it, yet so devoted to science and to art that he would composedly attend the victims to their execution that he might study in their faces the degrees of their agony and terror, and note the least quivering of the muscles, he was the very embodiment of the scientific spirit. At the conclusion of a day in which he had, against his custom, been drawn into a dispute, expounding to a group of literati the evolution of animate and inanimate nature based upon his study of stratification and of fossil remains, he writes in his diary:—

"The disciples of Aristotle, men of words and of books, . . . perceive not that my matters are to be expounded rather by experience than by words; experience, which truly was mistress of all those who have written well; which I will take for my mistress, by which, in all cases, I will stand or fall."

If his method was the inductive, his philosophy was that love attends upon knowledge :—

“The study of nature is well-pleasing to God, and is akin to prayer. Learning the laws of nature we magnify the first Inventor, the Designer of the world; and we learn to love Him, for great love of God results from great knowledge. . . . Remember, children, love is the daughter of knowledge; and the deeper the knowledge of God the greater fervency of love. Wherefore in the Scripture it is written, ‘Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves.’

“‘But who,’ retorted Cesare, a pupil, ‘can combine the sweetness of the dove with the cunning of the serpent? To my thinking we must choose between the two.’

“‘Not so,’ cried Leonardo; ‘there must be a fusion. I tell you perfect knowledge of the universe and perfect love of God are one thing and the same.’”

In his earlier years Leonardo painted two canvases, the complements of each other: one was *The Fall*, the other *The Adoration of the Lamb*. In the first Leonardo realized the boldness of reason, the wisdom of the serpent; in the second, the innocence of the dove, the humility of faith. But the second was never finished, because there was something in faith that Leonardo could not fathom. In the words of Merejkowski, “In the quest for perfection he made difficulties for himself which his brush could not overcome.” What was this something? It was not that he lacked humility, for a favorite pupil said of him: “He is proud as Lucifer, in spite of his lamblike meekness and his universal charity.” What then was it? At Milan he created at the same time for Ludovico Sforza two notable works of art: *Il Cavallo*, the heroic equestrian statue of Francesco Sforza, who, the son of a peasant, strong as a lion, astute as a fox, attained by sagacity, by crime, and by great exploits, the throne of the Dukes of Milan; and the *Cenacolo*, the Last Supper. Beneath the colossal figure of Francesco, Leonardo had inscribed :—

“Expectant animi molemque futuram  
Suscipiunt; fluat aes, vox erit, Ecce Deus.”

A pupil was standing before the statue.—

“‘Master,’ he said presently, ‘I crave your pardon, but I have thought long, and still I comprehend not how you

were able to create the *Cavallo* and *Cenacolo* at one and the same time.'

"Leonardo looked at his disciple in quiet surprise.

"'Why not?'

"'Oh, Messer Leonardo! do you not feel yourself that they are impossible together?'

"'No, Giovanni. To my thinking, one helps out the other. My best ideas for the *Cenacolo* come to me when I am working at the Colossus; and in that convent refectory yonder, I love to think upon this monument of Duke Francesco. The works are twins. I began them together, and together I shall finish them.'

"'Together! Christ and this man? It is impossible! . . . Of which of those twain does he say in his heart: "Behold the god?"'"

Yet to the artist, with his eye fixed upon the archetypal man, the man of the future, the statue represented that exuberance of physical life and that majesty of the human will which the super-man must possess.

The face of Christ in the *Cenacolo* was long delayed, so long delayed that Leonardo's pupils sometimes felt that it would never be painted in. The delay was of course due to the artist's struggle to define the face. Finally it was completed. Giovanni, the favorite pupil, is greatly perturbed when he sees it; he does not find the Man of Sorrows, the mediæval suffering Christ.

"You wish to know whom he has painted, if 'tis not the weaker Christ who prayed for a hopeless miracle in the Garden of Gethsemane? Well, I will tell you. Remember that beautiful invocation of Leonardo's when he spoke of the laws of the mechanical sciences: 'O, divine justice of Thee, thou Prime Mover!' His Christ is the Prime Mover, who, principle and centre of every movement, is Himself moveless. His Christ is the eternal necessity, which is divine justice, which is the Father's will. 'O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee, and I have declared unto these Thy name, that the love where-with Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.' Do you see? Love born of knowledge. . . . And Leonardo, who alone of men has understood this saying of the Lord's, has incarnated it in his Christ, who loves all because He knows all."

The Christ of the Last Supper thus attempts to harmonize the Hellenic and the Christian ideals. Yet even so, there was something of a lack, as in *The Adoration*. What this something was, Leonardo was destined to learn, yet too late for it to affect his work, from the lips of La Gioconda, her whose portrait was to become, as it were, an objectification of the artist's most mysterious and elusive thoughts.

It is the morning of Mona Lisa's last visit to the studio, a brilliant morning, and Leonardo lowers the canvas curtain to produce the "dim and tender light, transparent as submarine shadows, which gave her face its greatest charm." As the artist paints, a shadow flits across her face. To recover and hold her expression he relates one of his mystic tales, in which he represents himself, between Fear and Curiosity, searching a dark cavern for its secret.

"He was silent. The unwonted shadow still lay upon her face.

"Which of the two feelings gained the day?' La Gioconda murmured.

"Curiosity.'

"And you learned the stupendous secret?'

"I learned . . . what could be learned.'

"And will reveal it to men?'

"I would not, nor could not, reveal all. But I would inspire them also with curiosity strong enough to banish fear.'

"And if curiosity be not enough, Messer Leonardo?' she said slowly, an unwonted fire in her eyes; 'if something further, a profounder feeling were needed to lay bare the cavern's last and greatest treasure?' And she turned toward him a smile he had never seen before.

"What more is needed?' he asked.

"She was silent. Just then a slender blinding ray shone through a rent in the curtain; the dimness vanished; the mystery, the clear shadows, tender as distant music, fled."

The one essential element lacking in Leonardo was thus the free play of strong, spontaneous emotion. His emotions were all mentally predigested. Like modern science, he found—though in his case too late—that the scientific spirit had its limitations. "Was it not only a step," says Merejkowski, in another



book, "that divided the maker of the figure of Christ in the Last Supper from the second incarnation in which I believe, from the ever-intensifying reign of the Spirit? But Leonardo never took that step. . . . His dream 'to be incarnated finally and without recall' thus remained only a dream. And in spite of all his love for Euclidian formulæ, for earthly 'realism,' he yet passed over the earth, scarcely leaving a trace, like a shadow, a phantom, a bloodless spirit, with silent lips and averted face."

If Leonardo lacked the Aryan impulse, it was present in Michael Angelo to a superlative degree. And these men are thus complementary :—

"It is just here in the Sistine Chapel that Michael Angelo, with unheard-of boldness, stripped Man of his thousand-year-old Christian covering and, like the ancients, again looked into the mystic depths of the body—that inaccessible 'gulf,' as Tolstoi calls it. And in the faces of the naked, weeping, seemingly intoxicated youths, the elemental Demons round the Old Testament frescoes in the Sistine, as in the face of Moses at San Pietro in Vincoli, that dread, inhuman face, with the monstrous horns instead of a nimbus, Pan-like, Satyr-like, goatish, we see revived the Aryan idea, immemorially old, yet ever new, of the union of the divine and the animal, of 'God's creature,' of the God-beast. These half-gods, half-beasts, by whom the natural is carried into the supernatural, these beings, huge-sinewed and muscular, in whom 'we see only the face and the body, but the soul at times seems absent,' are pregnant with an electric, Bacchic excess of animal life, like the *Night* and *Morning* of the Medici monument, the *Cumæan Sibyl*, or the *Scythian Captives*, as if they wished, but could not awake out of a trance, and with vain, incredible effort were striving after thought, consciousness, spiritualization, deliverance from the flesh, the stone, the matter which binds them. There is nothing that has less desire to be Christian than they."

The tragedy of the Renaissance was that it exhausted itself before men who would combine the powers of Michael Angelo and Leonardo were produced. Raphael seemed to have the opportunity, but prostituted his art. The foundation of the new civilization seemed about to be laid before men's very eyes. Humanity trembled on the verge of the great achievement, and then fell backward, impotent.

The torch that lay smoldering in Italy was eventually carried, in accordance with the Divine plan, to Russia. *Peter and Alexis* pictures the early conflict of the revived Paganism with Christianity in the Slavic nation. This romance is less convincing than the others, so far as Merejkowski's major thesis is concerned, although it pictures with daring vividness the conflict of personalities in the great monarch and his son. For our purpose the most significant episode is at the very close, where a young seeker after religious truth meets in a trance St. John the Divine, and catches a vision of the new Church, the Church of the Spirit.

In 1905 Merejkowski saw the torch, now a pillar of fire, beckoning the Russian race on to the higher destiny. He was thrilled with expectancy,—and with fear: "An almost unbearable burden of responsibility is thus laid on our generation. Perhaps the destinies of the world never hung so finely in the balance before, as if on the edge of a sword between two chasms. The spirit of man is faintly conscious that the beginning of the end is in sight."

Instead of a fourth romance depicting a high renaissance in which the supreme claims of life would be felt and defined by men of superlative power and insight as effectively as they had been by the great spirits of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, and in which the promise of the age-awaited harmony would approach fulfillment, Merejkowski substituted his critical estimates of Tolstoi and Dostoïevski, Tolstoi the Michael Angelo, and Dostoïevski the Leonardo da Vinci of the Russian renaissance. These outstanding spirits are interpreted as having brought Russia to the very threshold of the new age, and in the concluding paragraph Merejkowski declares himself one of "a handful of Russians hungering and thirsting after the fulfillment of their new religious idea: who believe that in a fusion between the thought of Tolstoi and that of Dostoïevski will be found the Symbol—the union—to lead and revive.

"A child's hand may unseal the invisible will in any one of us; may unseal its spring of immense and exploding waters—living forces of destruction and regeneration. It needs, perhaps, but that the meanest of us should say to

himself: 'Either I must do this thing, or none will, and the face of the earth will be changed.'"

These words, seemingly so child-like and naïve, are uttered with a fervor of spirit as beautiful as it is strange. Merejkowski's faith in the spiritual leadership of his nation, in the omni-humanity of Russia, is akin to that of the Hebrew prophets, and and it is a sublime picture that he makes in the closing pages, standing in an agony of anxious waiting, torn between expectation and doubt, looking for that Second Coming which is to bring the fuller salvation to mankind. Our eyes, fixed upon some far-off eventuality, some golden age reserved for our children of a shadowy future, go blind.

Merejkowski develops his thesis with much ingenuity and finesse. Tolstoi is represented as having looked into the mysterious depths of the physical with a clairvoyant insight such as no other man has ever possessed. He was a Greek, but more than a Greek. The intoxicating perfume and the fresh touch of wet spring boughs against his face were among the earliest of his recollections, and in this earthly delight and love for the things of the earth, in this animal love for the body, lay the germ of the more than earthly, for he felt through the earthly toward the spiritual.

"The special glory of Tolstoi," says Merejkowski, "lies exactly in the faith that he was the first to express—and with what fearless sincerity!—new branches, unexhausted and inexhaustible, of over-subtilizing physical and mental consciousness. We may say that he gave new bodily sensations, new vessels for new wine. . . ."

"The Apostle Paul divides human existence into three branches, borrowing the division from the philosophers of the Alexandrian school, the physical man, the spiritual, and the natural. The last is the connecting link between the first two, something intermediate, double, transitional, like twilight; neither Flesh nor Spirit, that in which the Flesh is completed and the Spirit begins, in the language of physiology, the physico-spiritual phenomenon.

"Tolstoi is the greatest depicter of this physico-spiritual region in the natural man; that side of the flesh which approaches the spirit, and that side of the spirit which approaches the flesh, the mysterious border-region where the struggle between the animal and the God in man takes place."

Merejkowski develops this conclusion with great particularity. He notes how Tolstoi keeps constantly employing some peculiar physical characteristic, repeated in various connections, as an outward sign of an inward condition: the short, downy lip of the Princess Volkowski, noted first when she was a child and last when her husband looked down into her dead face; the "red patches" on the face of the Princess Maria; the long thin neck of Verestchagin; the "small plump hands" of Napoleon. He observes how Tolstoi has detected the commonplace which others have failed to see simply because too obvious:—

"Thus he first made the discovery, apparently so simple and easy, but which for thousands of years has evaded all observers, that the smile is reflected, not only on the face, but in the sound of the voice, that the voice as well as the face can be smiling. Platon Karataev at night, when Pierre cannot see his face, says something to him, 'in a voice changed by a smile.' . . . He was the first to notice that the sound of horse-hoofs is, as it were, a 'transparent sound.'"

Merejkowski concludes his analysis with the observation that—

"The most intangible gradations and peculiarities of sensation are distinguished to correspond with the character, sex, age, bringing up, and status of the person experiencing them. It seems that in this region there are no hidden ways for him. His sensual experience is inexhaustible, as if he had lived hundred of lives in various shapes of men and animals. He fathoms the unusual sensation of her bared body to a young girl, before going to her first ball. So, too, the feelings of a woman growing old and worn out with child bearing, who 'shudders as she remembers the pain of her quivering breasts, experienced with almost every child.' Also of a nursing mother, who has not yet severed the mysterious connection of her body with that of her child, and who 'knows for a certainty, by the excess of milk in her, that the child is insufficiently fed.' Lastly, the sensations and thoughts of animals, for instance, the sporting dog of Levine, to whom the face of her master seems 'familiar,' but his eyes 'always strange.'"

The tragedy of Tolstoi's life, however,—for Merejkowski considers that his life was a tragedy,—lay just in the fact that he became distrustful of himself and, actuated by a morbid and

selfish anxiety about his own welfare, in his later years imposed upon his spirit a crushing weight of Hebraism which stifled the exquisite nature beneath. When he should have continued seeking God within through the medium of his superlative senses, he gave up the quest, to search for God without. In his infidelity he sought to mortify the flesh, and this mortification of the flesh led to what it always leads to, mortification of the spirit. Chosen to reveal the human body in all its mystic significance, the Aryan spirit of Life, he became distrustful of himself, and deserting that Messiah who came a babe laid among the cattle, who rode in triumph "sitting on an ass and a colt, the foal of an ass," who taught man the simplicity and wisdom of animals, the glory of the lilies and the resurrection of the body, reverted to the asceticism of the traditional Christian philosophy, the Semitic spirit of Death; the result was a "gradually increasing silence, callousness, decline, ossification, and petrification of the heart, once the warmest of human hearts."

As Tolstoi was designed to reveal the physical man reaching up into the natural, so Dostoïevski, at the other pole, was to reveal the spiritual reaching down into the natural. Dostoïevski said of himself, "They call me a psychologist; it is not true, I am only a realist in the highest sense of the word, i. e., I depict all the soul's depths." Again, "What most people call fantastic is, in my eyes, often the very essence of the real." Dostoïevski's province is the mysterious, the enigmatic, the half-revealed. His method is a vigorous application of the scientific, for he surrounds the phenomena of nature with artificial and exceptional conditions, just as does the chemist in his laboratory, in order that under unusual pressure of the moral atmosphere unforeseen aspects and hidden powers of the human soul may be revealed. He, so to speak, provided himself with a "laboratory of the most delicate and exact apparatus and contrivances for measuring, testing, and weighing humanity." His product is a demonstration that the ordinary, not the remote, is the source of the supernatural, that "what seems most trivial, rough and fleshly marches with what is most spiritual, or, as he called it, 'fantastic,' i. e. religious," that with the agnosticism of science the terror of phenomena begins. "We had hoped," says Merejkowski in

commenting on this last phase, "that all the shadows of the non-scientific would vanish in the light of science, but, on the contrary, the brighter the lights, the blacker, more distinctly defined and mysterious are the shadows become. We have but extended the field of our ignorance. Men have become scientific, and their shadows, the ghosts, imitating and hurrying after them, grow scientific too."

Dostoïevski has anticipated the drama of the future, the substance of which will be thinking passion or passionate thought, for whereas *Faust* and *Hamlet*, greatest dramatic creations of the past, are tragedies precisely because of the conflict between the passionate heart and passionless thought, Dostoïevski has placed on the stage of art the passions of the mind.

Merejkowski concludes his exhaustive analysis of Tolstoi and Dostoïevski in the following summary:—

"We have seen that Tolstoi is the greatest portrayer of the human animal in language, as Michael Angelo was in colors and marble. He is the first who has dared to strip the human frame of all social and historical wrapping and again entertain the Aryan ideas. Tolstoi is the Russian Michael Angelo, the re-discoverer of the human body, and although we feel all through his works the Semitic dread of the body, yet he has felt the possibility of a final victory over this dread, complete as in the days of Praxiteles and Phidias.

"Just as Tolstoi has explored the depths of the flesh, so Dostoïevski explored those of the spirit, and showed that the upper gulf is as deep as the lower, that one degree of human consciousness is often divided from another, one thought from another by as great an inaccessibility as divides the human embryo from non-existence. And he has wrestled with the terrors of the spirit, that of consciousness over-distinct and over-acute, with the terror of all that is abstract, spectral, fantastical, and at the same time pitilessly real and matter-of-fact. Men feared or hoped that some day reason would dry up the spring of the heart, that knowledge would kill creation, not conscious that they are coupled and that one is impossible without the other. That fact embodies our last and highest hope."

If it is the manifest destiny of Russia to blaze the new trail for civilization, what are patriotic Russians to do? Writing in 1905, under the pressure of the former revolution, Merejkowski said:—

"One should no longer be concerned with heavenly advantage but with earthly affairs and social conditions; instead of being conquered by the government one should conquer it, permeate it with one's spirit, and thus realize the prophecy of the Apocalypse of the millenium of the saints on earth, and destroy the forms of the power of the government, the laws, and the Empire. Such a renewal of Christianity demands an energetic struggle, self-forgetfulness, and martyrs."

Politically, then, the mission of Russia is to create a government that will be the symbol and agent of liberated personalities. Socially, her mission is to achieve the superman, a superman who will embrace and fuse the lofty self-assurance and sublime will of the Nietzschean ideal, the humility and passion of sacrifice of traditional Christianity, the rich, joyous life of the senses that gave to Greece the immortal charm of youth, and the intellectual thoroughness and scientific spirit of the Renaissance.

Such is the patriotic programme of a brilliant, forward-looking Russian. The reaction to this programme of those readers who have been sufficiently patient to follow through this long analysis will be varied enough. Some will quarrel with Merejkowski's interpretation of Hebraism or of historical Christianity; some will refuse to believe that a union of Greek and Christian ideals is either desirable or possible; others, in the light of recent events, will dismiss with a cynical smile the suggestion that Russia is to lead the world in political, social, and religious reform; and still others, believing that we have not yet learned the most elementary lessons in the preservation and perpetuation of genius in a single family, much less in a nation, will pronounce Merejkowski's faith in the sudden florescence of a race of supermen as biologically unsound. But whatever our individual reaction may be, we shall be the better citizens of the world of to-morrow if we understand the dreams and hopes of other men and other nations. The present is no time for the man of provincial mind.

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